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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the value, in English-as-a-Second-Language medium tertiary education, of extending the notion of student autonomy beyond the context of language learning to the whole curriculum, arguing that autonomy needs to be seen in a broader, more socio-political perspective and that for students to enjoy autonomy requires a transformation in the roles not only of students, but in those of language teachers and subject teachers within the academic curriculum. Greater critical awareness is needed of the educational constraints imposed by prevailing concepts of "skills" as the basis of a tertiary communication curriculum and of knowledge as curricular "capital." It is suggested that underlying these notions are discourses that are adversarial; dualistic; and, ultimately, assimilationist. Although the language education discourse community may preach a critical approach, they often fall short of such critical standards in their own peer-directed public discourse. It is suggested that problem areas in language education include socialization, preoccupation with skills, and the dangers of dualism. (Contains 62 references.) (Author/NAV)

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Practising What We Preach : Creating the Conditions for Student Autonomy

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Abstract

This paper explores the value, in ESL-medium tertiary education, of extending the notion of student autonomy beyond the context of language learning to the whole curriculum. I argue that autonomy needs to be seen in a broader, more socio-political perspective, that for students to enjoy autonomy requires a transformation in the roles not only of students, but of language teachers and subject teachers within the academic curriculum. Greater critical awareness is needed of the educational constraints imposed by prevailing concepts of 'skills' as the basis of a tertiary communication curriculum, and of knowledge as curricular 'capital'. I suggest that underlying these notions are discourses which are adversarial, dualistic and ultimately assimilationist. I look at how members of our own (language education) discourse community may preach a critical approach, but very often fall short of such critical standards in their own peer-directed public discourse. Finally, I look at implications of a more socialised discourse for our own EAP curricular practice, and offer suggestions on constructive ways to promote the conditions for greater student autonomy in the tertiary curriculum.

Introduction

In this paper, I attempt to address the issue of *autonomy* within what I see as interwoven contexts: the broad professional community of and the more situated context of my professional practice, teaching EAP to undergraduate students in the Social Sciences Faculty at the University of Hong Kong. In this context, I have come increasingly to see my work in terms of the development of language *awareness* and language *socialisation* rather than language *learning* and *teaching*, which I find oriented to narrow cognitive, linguistic or other measures of incremental behavioural change - English enhancement with 'go faster stripes'. I see tertiary EAP as tending to be overly concerned with yielding skills-related results in a curriculum of diminishing returns, with skills framed in psychological learning-related terms, rather than in terms of sociological awareness. In this paper I shall look at some of the work which is beginning to have an influence in changing that balance, in emphasising the social and political dimensions of language practice, and of educational practice in general.

The historical context in which EAP has evolved - particularly in colonial or ex-colonial ESL-medium systems - is, of course, an ever-present factor in any discussion of autonomy. I take the perspective that the relationship between power, knowledge and language can be found working not only *between* societies but equally *within* them. I have written elsewhere of the interesting parallels Said (1993) draws between nations, institutions and disciplines in their preoccupations with territory and borders (Bruce, 1993). It may also be interesting to consider the microcosmic implications of the parallels Ngugi draws

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between **education** and **assimilation**, and the crucial role in the colonising process he attributes to language (see also Pennycook, 1994a & b on this). Comparing the French and British colonising 'styles' in Africa, Ngugi writes:

> If it was the gun which made possible the mining of this gold and which effected the political captivity of their owners, it was language which held captive their cultures, their values, and hence their minds. ...The French, faithful to the philosophical and aesthetic traditions of their culture, had given the whole process a name: assimilation. The English, less aesthetically and philosophically inclined, simply called it education (1993: 31-2).

Looking to freedom from such domination, Ngugi writes, later: "A people are truly free when they control all the tools, all the instruments, all the means of their physical, economic, political, cultural and psychological survival" (1993: 78). This colonial metaphor is an appropriate one to keep in mind in considering both the theoretical critique and the curricular recommendations that follow: the level of participation in the negotiation of a curriculum, in the investigation of what constitute the current paradigms of knowledge, and in the ownership of the valued discourses and of the cultural knowledge that constitutes and is constituted by those discourses. How far, in short, is the education we are promoting simply a form of cultural assimilation, and how far is it a partnership in the creation and definition of new cultures and new knowledges? It is with these questions in mind that I suggest we turn to look at what might be useful notions of autonomy in higher education.

Defining autonomy

The whole notion of 'autonomy' is problematic. The Concise Oxford Dictionary (1970 edition) defines autonomy as

> Right of self-government; personal freedom; freedom of the will; a self-governing community.

- literally, derived from the Greek, *self-law* or *-rule*. Autonomy in the language learning context has tended to be defined in performative terms ('freedom *to*'), as the taking charge of all areas of one's learning (cf. Dickinson, 1987). If we explore the literal sense of 'nomos' (= *law*) as providing groups of individuals with protection and constraint (see Little, 1991: 4-5), we come closer to dealing with underlying social and political constraints on student autonomy. 'Freedom' dominates the dictionary definition, but I would like to argue that freedom in education - particularly higher education - requires consideration in the ablative - freedom *from* constraints, oppression, etc., and the conditions under which freedoms are given *by* those with institutional power - the power amongst others to name - to control the terms by which students are 'interpellated' as receivers of an education. This broader social perspective was taken early on by Holec (1981), who emphasised the need to simultaneously enhance learners' abilities and address the constraints on their freedom to exercise those abilities. Language teaching in the meantime seems to have continued to move towards more psychological explanations and approaches to language teaching and to enhancing learner independence. Terms like autonomy and independence send mixed messages, having been appropriated by divergent pedagogies.

I argue in this paper that any substantive autonomy for students requires a transformation of the roles of both student and language teacher within the academic curriculum, in the pursuit of freedom from the constraints of prevailing concepts of learning and knowledge, of academics as guardians and purveyors of that knowledge, and of students as its passive recipients. This kind of autonomy requires deeper changes to attitudes, philosophies and power relations than simply according to students on a particular course the freedom to determine their learning programme. I believe the fundamental conditions in which students are constructed within the academy (familiar constructions like 'passive recipients', 'inherently lazy', or 'wanting spoon-feeding') need changing - out of respect for students both as a community with distinct concerns and economic circumstances, and as members of a broader academic community with rights of full participation in the knowledge-making process. This, of course, is not a situation confined to ESL education; Lemke accuses mainstream education in the U.S. of 'infantilising' young adults by denying them

responsible social roles and according them only a 'trivial role' in the directions and forms of their education (1995: 138-9). Language educators, I suggest, are in a position of responsibility within the academy of using their language awareness and their pedagogical expertise to promote awareness in the rest of the academy of the key role of language not only in shaping our ideas but in prosecuting them socially, while respecting diversity of perspective, language and culture.

In the next part of this paper, I look more closely at what I see as key problem areas in language education. I discuss these under the following headings:

- Socialisation: re-thinking the social in language education
- The preoccupation with skills: issues of pragmatism and ideology
- Dangers of dualism: who guards the guardians ?

In the third part of the paper, I offer a discourse analysis case study to illustrate how members of our own (language education) discourse community may preach a critical approach, but very often fall short of such critical standards in their own peer-directed public discourse. I then conclude with some suggestions for how EAP teachers might create the kinds of sociocultural and educational conditions that would enable students to enjoy greater autonomy in pursuing their educations.

Some issues

Socialisation: re-thinking the social in language education

Learner autonomy has come to be a dominating motif in the discourse of progressive language education, part of a growing movement towards giving students a greater say in managing their own learning. Part Rogerian educational psychology, this idea is probably equally indebted to the old adage that you can lead a horse to water, but if you don't have empirical evidence as to what it actually likes to drink, how, when or how fast, then .... (Nunan, 1995, develops a similar theme on the discrepancy between what teachers teach and what they think learners learn). However, we need to question claims that pursuing greater individual choice and personal goal setting for learners actually promotes a more value-free education, ensuring that teachers' values get left outside the classroom and away from the students. A more critical pedagogical analysis will tend to look more deeply for the continuing influence of the values of the dominant (and dominating) culture, not least in the rather insulated world of academia. This debate has been prominent in composition and ESL journals (e.g. Benesch, 1993; Santos, 1992) and is the subject of the debate chosen as a 'case study' in the second part of this paper, featuring France and Stotsky (1993).

Auerbach (1993) is among those who argue that so-called *'learner-centred'* pedagogies are basically more humanistic forms of cultural assimilation, designed to allow greater student expression within a broader context of control. The focus may be on self-realization, emphasising learners' involvement with curriculum development processes (setting own goals, exploring own experiences, shaping the curriculum, evaluating it, etc.), but how far is curricular control genuinely relinquished to students ? The teachers' role may shift from transmitter of information to facilitator of classroom dynamics and negotiator of the curriculum, but how far can we say they relinquish control of *their* curriculum. Most curricula operate on the understanding that there are values, techniques and knowledge to be imparted by teachers to students: acculturation of whatever hue.

I should like at this point to query the frequent equation of 'acculturation' with '*socialisation*', since I feel, like Elinor Ochs (1986), that the latter term needs freeing from its status as a fossilised sociological construct whose very use has come to imply reactionary educational values. Ochs rejects the universalist view of socialisation, of children being socialised into mental structures that are universal or culturally and linguistically circumscribed. She proposes a relativistic (Whorfian) version of socialisation, arguing that we acquire a world view as we acquire a particular language in a particular culture (see also Cameron, 1990, for a rejection of 'language reflects society' accounts). Ochs characterises socialisation as a dynamic process in which novices and experts jointly act and speak, and in so doing involve themselves in the 'interactional generation of social and cultural understandings'. She suggests that 'individuals and

society construct one another through social interaction', offering the contemporary example of children as 'socialisers of computer literacy within their respective households' (1986: 1-2). Surely, then, in the educational context, teachers could come to accept students as co-constructors of knowledge, and as contributors to an on-going process of socialisation - social change - that implicates teachers, too.

Auerbach uses the term 'participatory' to describe approaches to adult ESL which genuinely focus on social transformation, emphasising drawing curriculum content from the social context of learners' lives *as well as* involving them in curriculum development processes. However, students, at least in my experience of higher education, remain a long way from this kind of participatory role in the curriculum; they are distinct outsiders in terms of power relations within the academy, or of having 'title' to forms of authorised knowledge, or competency in the kinds of 'intellectual currency' accepted within that academy. It is important that teachers interested in a more inclusive curriculum adopt a more sceptical construction of the position of students in the curriculum, a status, effectively, of disenfranchised and disempowered outsider. This view is surely confirmed when contemplating our practices within the academy, and the processes we require students to engage in - 'learning' the curriculum, being assessed on scales of intellectual competence, coverage of copious syllabi, and the retention of myriad facts and authorised 'theories' - stories ? - about the world. This is what Freire (1990: 40) calls 'systematic education', designed in his view expressly to discourage students from questioning the social order - often called 'the existing' social order, to add to its aura of permanence. Freire identifies this kind of education with *banking*, students being treated as objects requiring filling up with tokens of our intellectual currency. Freire describes this imperative of cultures to regenerate themselves in this way - effectively casting our students in our own image - as 'necrophiliac'. This image of faculty as morticians and knowledge as formaldehyde evokes Riley's (1988) citation of Margaret Mead's observations of Balinese culture as a possible allegory for the way in which faculty might ultimately be seen as wishing to control the learning and communication of their students:

> children are regarded as incarnations of their ancestors and therefore fully competent members of society. To sustain this social fiction, adults continually put words into their mouths and speak on their behalfs. The children are allowed to do nothing for themselves. The adults even shape the children's gestures with their own hands.

Freire's ideas have been taken up by many of the more radical educationists in the U.S. and Canada (Auerbach, 1993, Aronowitz & Giroux 1991, Giroux, 1992; Simon, 1992) in support of policies and strategies for working with the disempowered to resist their cultural assimilation, and for creating the basis for transforming social and educational systems into more equitable ones. While aimed mostly at immigrant and minority educational contexts, these ideas of cultural assimilation can also, I suggest, be applied to the generation of young adults who make up the tertiary student population. The question arises at the practical curricular level, then: what do marginalised people have to do to transform their lives and resist cultural assimilation? Freire (1990) advocates 'critical reflection' and 'collective action', and there is a beguilingly familiar ring about such terms, raising another question: is it possible for two educationists to use these terms and mean completely different things? In the next section we look at some alternative constructions that have been placed on the ostensibly neutral notion of language 'skills'.

The preoccupation with skills: issues of pragmatism and ideology

Arguably, a major effect of the communicative revolution in language teaching was the privileging of practical language 'skills', increasingly augmented in the tertiary sector by 'study' skills. Pennycook (1994c) argues that such language skill-based curricula show the pervasive influence of what he calls the 'educo-psychological' paradigm of language learning, which emphasises individualism and independence rather than a more social dimension to study or language use. An indication of this psycholinguistic dominance is the importance accorded to the *assessment* of language learning, its scaling, ranking, quantification and measurement. Particularly interesting for an analysis of the trend towards quantifying learning progress is Fairclough's notion of *commodification*. This refers to

> the process whereby social domains and institutions, whose concern is not producing commodities in the narrower economic sense of goods for sale, come nevertheless to be

> organised and conceptualised in terms of commodity production, distribution and consumption (Fairclough, 1993: 133)

Fairclough suggests that educational practice has been gradually restructured on a market model, citing the frequent reference to the ELT 'industry', to courses as things to be marketed, and the naming of students as 'clients or consumers' (1992: 7). He points to an ambiguity about the identity being constructed for these 'clients', being cast both as 'active' discerning and financially autonomous paying clients, and passive trainees consigned by personnel, targeted for training in required *skills*. This term '*skills*', according to Fairclough, is the persuasive key to selling education - it allows these 2 contradictory constructions of the learner to coexist without manifest inconsistency. It seems to fit into either an individualistic and subjectivist view of learning (the 'autonomous' learner), or with an objectivist, even behaviouristic view of training. Skills are prized attributes and tend to be seen as more democratic and less 'canonical' than knowledge, which is framed in terms of a 'high culture' of western literacy and experience; skills offer opportunity to everyone, if only they are given appropriate *training*. On the other hand, the concept of skill has normative implications: skills are assumed to be transferable across contexts, occasions and users, in a way which leaves little space for individuality. This can be seen in the more mimetic approaches, featuring explicit generic models for students to copy. Fairclough suggests that the placing of primary language skills like reading, writing, etc. at the heart of the ELT curriculum helps to *commodify* the content of language education, facilitating its division into discrete units, separately assessable, and exchangeable as distinct goods in the marketplace.

This line of argument would clearly cast the dominant ELT teaching approaches as driven by a pragmatist ideology, and there has recently been considerable debate on the issue of the role of ideology in ELT (L1 and L2), with 'pragmatism' being constructed very differently as, on the one hand, 'ideologically neutral', even resisting ideology in ELT, and on the other hand as being profoundly ideological and representing the dominant ideology within the field (Pennycook, 1994c). Pennycook argues that the psycho-educational discourses he identifies reflect an ideological stance of political quietism which he characterises as 'pragmatism', an ideology which denies 'the possibilities of dealing with broader social, cultural or political contexts of discourse' (1994c 129). If we tie this view in with Fairclough's commodification motif, we have an interesting perspective from which to view the aggressive way that academics - people in general - prosecute and defend their ideas in public forums. One area where I would argue we can see the commodification of our professional discourse is in some of the 'cost-benefit' rhetoric in the ESP literature.

In a recent issue of the *Journal of Second Language Writing* ('*Too Much On Our Plates*', 1993), Ann Johns rises to the defence of alleged 'pragmatist' ESP practitioners in response to Terry Santos' criticisms (1993), accusing mainstream ESL educators of excluding ideology from their curriculum and failing to follow the L1 composition community who have increasingly, she argues, been foregrounding ideology in their curricula. Santos (1992) had argued for more of an ideological perspective in ESL, even an overt politicisation. Johns responded, as though personally challenged to respond to the call:

> We (in ESL) are expected to perform miracles with students in the shortest possible periods of time imaginable, teaching the most difficult of the skills while being allotted little time for research, preparation, study - or ideological discussion. Our plates are too full. (1993: 86).

Johns' response seems to me to put the EAP quandary in the context of a wider contemporary debate: how do you reconcile political neutrality or conformity with critical independence ? How does the analytical and interpretive process of 'cracking the codes' of academic communication and culture remain non-ideological ? Underlying these arguments might lie a tension between accepting and challenging the status quo. It is interesting to view the debate through the prism of a Marxist critique, through a materialist metaphor, casting the debate in terms of workers versus management on the issue of proposed ownership of the means of production and equal profit-sharing. Fairclough's work draws on Marxist social and economic analysis in very persuasive ways, sensitive to the need for reflexive awareness of the interests of all the parties to the analysis, not least the researcher. This is one of the features of critical ethnography which have influenced advocates of a more critical approach to language teaching and to discourse analysis.

A cornerstone of such an approach, though, must be the rejection of any doctrinaire intolerance for diversity of culture, perspective or discourse. Further, the language one group speaks must have its resonances in the language of other groups, recognising that language habits are part of a community's shared learning (Brice Heath 1983: 11). If we apply this to our professional situation, with its combination of peer and teacher-student communication, we have to accept that there will be resonances between those two domains of discourse. As Pennycook puts it, 'we need to be very aware both of the discourses into which we are asking our students to move and of the discourses in which we as teachers are engaged' (1994c: 132).

A great deal more could be said about critical language awareness and critical discourse analysis. There are understandably divergences among those sympathetic with the general thrust of a critical approach. Pennycook, for example (1994c), questions the supposition that texts can be read as revealing the workings of social structures, and is wary of the determinism of some sociological perspectives on language. He cites the 'representational fallacy', whereby a real, fairly static world of social relations is thought to be directly represented in language and language behaviour. This view echoes Ochs' relativistic view of people constructing their own reality socially and very much interactively (1986: 2). The perspective which seems to gain most consensus is the Foucauldian view, that sees discourse - or discourses - as systems of power/knowledge within which we take up subject positions - or rather within which they take us up. Fairclough (1992) devotes a chapter (2) to acknowledging the 'debt' (critical) discourse analysis owes to Foucault (esp. 1972), notably to his ideas on discourse as constitutive of knowledge, and 'discursive formations' as the rules for constituting areas of knowledge, and consequently for exercising social and political power (1992: 37-9).

Dangers of dualism: who guards the guardians ?

Pennycook (1994c) sees one strategy for exercising discursive power as the casting of discussions in dualist discourse, the construction of problems and alternative positions in monolithic dichotomisations, such as conservative vs radical, with all the generalisations that follow. Underpinning dualistic thinking we can discern a particular 'objectivist' perspective: a realist ontology - a belief in an objective, real world - and a positivistic epistemology - a belief that people's perceptions and statements are either true or false, right or wrong, a belief based on a view of knowledge as hard, real and acquirable. Said (1993) suggests that it is quite simply easier for people to define themselves in terms of what they are *not* - hence the articulacy in defining - and demonising - the *Other*. Burrell & Morgan (1979), in their search for overarching paradigms that might yield underlying commonalties between some of the proliferating social science theories, became particularly concerned about:

> the academic sectarianism reflected at various times in open hostility, ostrich-like indifference and generally poor-quality dialogue and debate between essentially related (i.e. objectivist) schools of thought (1979: ix)

At a theoretical level, then, there may be increasing lip-service paid to subjective, social constructionist versions of the world we live and work in, and on how we go about constructing and transacting - communicating, prosecuting, 'marketing' - knowledge. However, in the ways that people prosecute those beliefs, whether repelling peer attacks in professional journals, or packaging watertight accounts for undergraduates in lectures and textbooks, the dominant discursive style seems still to be to cast ideas dualistically as either right or wrong, or true or false. A typical such strategy might be a 'logocentric' one of constructing an in-group around a particular perspective or philosophy - hardened over time into parties, societies or disciplines - and then reinforcing the definition of that creed, as Said suggests (1993), by constructing an adversarial *Other*. John Clifford offers an example from the field of composition of this 'dichotomous turn'. His rhetorical question offers, I believe, a fairly commonplace example of polarity of argument, of casting a discussion in an adversarial, dichotomous form: :

> Are we (tertiary teachers of composition) intent on developing in our students the literacy skills and attitudes necessary to succeed in college and beyond, or do we hope to empower them with the critical habits of mind, with a skeptical intelligence, with an awareness of themselves as potential actors in a sociopolitical context ? (1991; 38).

We need to ask why teachers *should* be articulating crude conservative vs radical choices in this way, where the 'right' answer would seem to be to deny students the skills to succeed in college. Why should these options be cast as mutually exclusive, or each as having a single unambiguous meaning ? This is the route to adversarial stalemate, where the winning of the argument is paramount: taking part, like coming second, is akin to finishing last, defeated (see Turkle & Papert, 1991, on the aggression and polarisation that the academic enterprise of addressing abstract problems can generate). Other examples abound; the *IATEFL Newsletter* recently asked its readers to choose between ESP and EGP (English for *General* Purposes): 'Which comes first ?' - most of the replies duly responded in kind (May, 1994). As curriculum 'designers' in a fairly loosely-defined discipline, EAP, we need to become more aware of the extent to which our own discourse is marked by this kind of dualistic framing of issues, whether in our roles as applied linguists talking and (especially) writing to each other, in the constructions we make of our students and often realise in our learning models, or in our advice to and counseling of our students.

We need, I believe, to at least reflect on whether we practise what we preach, and on the manner in which our discourses are framed and exercised. David Little (1991) interestingly foregrounds George Kelly's personal construct theory in suggesting that diversity of perspective or worldview - or the lack of it - can be seen as having its roots in the ways in which we organise our world in terms of constructs or schemata. Here are some of Kelly's key precepts;

- we make sense of the world by construing it via sets of dichotomous personal constructs (e.g. good-bad; gentle-aggressive) .
- dichotomous constructs can be abstracted into relativistic scales; e.g from black vs. white to the relativistic *more grey* vs *less grey*
- people arrange their constructs into hierarchies, abstracting and organising them hierarchically into systems;

Looking at Kelly and subsequent work in developmental psychology, and then at work in critical language awareness (UK) and critical pedagogy (US), it becomes apparent that reflection on how we construct our world - and what we call 'knowledge' - needs to take a more central position, in both our theoretical enterprises and our teaching practice. At another level, the differences in the ways in which we relate to each other and to our students need to be brought into focus more; can we honestly say that we relate to both communities equally in terms of making and challenging knowledge ? It would be interesting to ask a range of tertiary teachers how differently or similarly they see themselves operating along a cultural conservation-transformation spectrum as first teachers, and then as researchers. But to ask how far educationists *should* be aiming at social transformation and how far at conservation is not necessarily to set up dichotomies or exclusive categories, but to explore *tensions* - possibly complementary tensions - within the various discourses that inform any university curriculum.

In the next part of this paper, I use a case study to take a critical look at what I see as fundamental problems with the way language and knowledge are cast in the tertiary curriculum, and at our own discourse practices as tertiary language educators. There is a danger in our field of perceiving other communities' levels of language awareness - both students and faculty - in terms of shortcomings, measuring them against structural and stylistic (generic) norms. This can lead us even further toward dissociating our own discursive practices from those communities with whom we need to reach greater levels of understanding and shared purpose. We need to ask ourselves, as we move on the one hand towards a Whole Language curriculum [e.g. Writing across the curriculum (WAC), Integrated Language and Content (ILC)], if we are, knowingly or unwittingly, keeping separate spheres for the discourses of our different communities: one set of rules and principles for our students, one for our analysis of the quirks of other disciplines' discourses (e.g. Selzer. 1993), and another for our own professional practice, in the domain of published exchanges about our theories and practice. This would be to deny a plurality of discourses *within* these communities, and therefore to give a hollow ring to any espousal of autonomy in the educational context. As Little argues (1991), autonomy starts 'at home': to assure learner autonomy, we need to assure teacher autonomy. I argue below that this process needs to start with a more critical language awareness of our own practice, notably of our professional discourse practices.

'Disciplined' Discourse ? : a look at our own discourse practices

In this section, I discuss the discursive practices of the broad academic community I identify and engage in academic communication with - language teachers and researchers. My focus is on a sub-genre of journal writing where, so to speak, we tend to 'take the gloves off' - i.e. when we shed our pedagoguish, anonymous personae and engage in head-to-head encounters with specific, identified colleagues. I have looked at the response sections in a number of journals in the fields of composition and language teaching, featuring readers' letters airing reactions to articles in previous issues. It is here that we might look for discrepancies between the language practices we teach others to use, and the language we use ourselves, particularly in public forums, when we seem prone to suspending our self-critical faculty. These '*Forum*' or '*Comment and Response*' columns offer rich evidence of the tendency for some academics to adopt a dualistic approach to the issues they raise, to categorise and label to the point of creating a Straw Man argument, and to exhibit such an intolerance of alternative positions that their discourse slips into the area of *ad hominem* (against the person) argumentation - strategies and attitudes I would suggest that the same academics, in their teaching guise, would be loathe to promote.

I take as a case in point a recent debate in *College English* (1993); Sandra Stotsky's original article, *Writing as moral and civic thinking* (1992), drew responses from Ted Lardner and Alan France (1993), to which Stotsky replied in the same issue. Stotsky (1992) had recommended that theorists, teachers and students of composition ought to acknowledge the moral and ethical dimensions of academic writing, maintaining a distinction between their personal and professional values and being careful not to impress their personal values on their students.

Lardner responds to Stotsky by saying initially that this "could not have been more timely" but admits to a mixed reaction. He makes his concession sympathetically; Stotsky, he says, questions the stance taken by those who seem to make their own "*social and political values the focus of their teaching*", citing Dale Bauer and Patricia Bizzell as teachers who "seek to alter our students' social and political values" (1992: 795). Lardner agrees with the argument that literacy and the skills of thinking critically are amongst the responsibilities central to the health and progress of democratic society, but disagrees on the role Stotsky casts for the teacher, separating the professional from the civic voice.

Alan France, in comparison, seems to have reacted more strongly against Stotsky's article (see extracts below). He takes issue with Stotsky's belief that a putative non-partisan code of academic principles should guide thinking and learning about any topic': "this argument for preserving the impartiality of academic discourse from social and political critique is a favourite political move of conservatives seeking to restrain criticism of existing power arrangements". Stotsky, he argues, recapitulates the conservative arguments for excluding from composition classes embarrassing social issues like racism, misogyny, rape, poverty and violence - and recalls a similar debate in *College Composition & Communication* stimulated by Maxine Hairston's critique of 'political zealots' in the writing class (1992). France then goes on to generalise to 'conservatives' in general: "Conservatives argue that since nobody's 'personal values' are better than anybody else's, leftists should drop their convictions at the classroom door - etc.,"

Alan France Writes (Extracts)

I would like to offer a reading of academic morality counter to that of Sandra Stotsky's "*Writing as Moral and Civil Thinking*". It is suggested by Brecht's aphorism, "Erst kommt das Fressen und dan kommt die Moral". A consequence of this view is that an insistence on academic civility serves the interests of the status quo, especially against those like Dale Bauer and Patricia Bizzell, who "seek to alter our students' social and political values". Instead, Stotsky believes that a putatively nonpartisan code of "academic principles ... should guide thinking and learning about any topic" (795)

This argument for preserving the impartiality of academic discourse from social and political critique (making it doubly academic, some might say) is a favourite political move of conservatives seeking to restrain criticism of existing power arrangements. And Stotsky in fact recapitulates the conservative arguments for excluding from composition classes embarrassing social issues like racism, misogyny, rapine, poverty, and violence (compare Maxine Hairston's attack on "political zealots" in the writing class - among whom she also numbers Bauer and Bizzell - in *CCC* [May 1992]). Conservatives argue that since nobody's "personal values" are better than anyone else's, leftists should drop their convictions at the classroom door, that students should write only about what interests them, which precludes topics that they find politically disagreeable, ... etc.

Stotsky seems to believe that composing is not so much a matter of accomplishing material purposes by available rhetorical means (including Sleddian philippics under certain circumstances), but of obeying certain moral and civic "obligations embedded in academic writing [itself]" (798). It seems to me, however, that these "academic principles" are not isolable from and are indeed none other than the rhetorical garb of conservative "social and political values"

Sandra Stotsky Responds (Extracts)

The letters by Professor Lardner and Professor France both raise the kinds of questions that need immediate and extensive discussion if higher education is to survive with public support. .....

As we must all be aware, our educational institutions at all levels of education have lost much of the public trust they once enjoyed in full measure. If we make a clear distinction between our professional life and our civic life and carry out our responsibilities in each to the fullest degree in their appropriate context, we might help to restore the meaning of academic life and the dignity of our profession in our students' and the public's eye.

Professor France's letter clearly illustrates why academic writing must be based on academically principled thinking. France's claim that academically principled thinking and writing are characteristics of "conservative" political values is certainly no compliment to liberal political values. The implication that academically unprincipled thinking and writing are characteristic of liberal academic discourse (or at least engaged in when they serve the writer's purpose) not only discredits liberals, it also eliminates any reason to maintain the university as an educational institution. What state legislature, parent, or other adult would want to support courses taught by avowedly unprincipled professors ? I hope Professor France rethinks his effort to assign political labels to the use or non-use of academic principles.

He finishes by asserting that '*these 'academic principles' are not isolable from and indeed are none other than the rhetorical garb of conservative 'social and political values*' (1993: 806).

Unsurprisingly, Stotsky responds very differently to the 2 writers. Lardner's more measured and balanced response evinces a long (3.5 pages), considered and considerate response from Stotsky - the dialogue is constructive. France, on the other hand, gets short shrift - literally, and a very different rhetorical stance and style (see extracts below. Stotsky appears particularly aggrieved at France's implication of a lack of principle in her educational philosophy or conduct, concluding with the hope that '*Professor France rethinks his effort to assign political labels to the use or non-use of academic principles'* (1993; 810).

This clear divergence between the two writers' schemas for the term 'principles' recalls Pecheux's work on political discourse (e.g. 1982), where different political perspectives can signify divergent constructs of the same term [e.g. militant = activist or subversive, depending on your political affiliation or disposition]. Alan France is concerned about Stotsky's advocacy of *'conceptualising writing as moral and civic thinking'*, not least because the antitheses of these concepts - 'immoral' and 'uncivil' - tend to command

the political and educational high ground. But his discourse style shows traces of *ad hominem* argumentation and an overt intolerance of Stotsky's viewpoint. France is clearly motivated by a desire to promote change within the profession, but adopts a style of discourse more likely to further polarise opinion. His strategy of associating Stotsky's position with that of 'conservatives', and then proceeding to further characterise conservatives' arguments and values is a classic strategy of labeling with a negative stereotype, and then addressing (thematising) that stereotype, rather than the person. This is damnation by association, and is a problem which seems to afflict a great deal of academic communication, where academics are encouraged to demonstrate the widest possible significance for the object of their study. This often involves categorisation at high levels of abstraction - notably 'isms' - aimed, we must suppose, at eliciting positive identification in the broadest possible audience.

France's style, I would argue, is monologic rather than dialogic, liable - and perhaps intended - to appeal only to the already converted - though this hypothesis would need to be put to the empirical test. The uncompromising tone suggests to me a lack of interest in any further constructive discussion, the kind of intransigent construction of alternative views as 'wrong' that is likely to drive both empiricists and relativists, possibly respectively, to the extremes of triumph and despair. Stotsky has the advantage of being able to direct her substantive responses to Lardner (though she acknowledges France also raises the same issues), while saving a token space in which to dismiss the manner of France's response - and suggesting the absence of certain values in his 'type' of position or attitude. The irony of Stotsky's position would not be lost on regular readers of *College English*, since the year before she herself was on the receiving end of an outraged response from Mike Rose, who accused her of going 'beyond criticism to broadside and personal denunciation' in her 1990 review of his 1988 anthology on literacy. He cites as evidence Stotsky's use of terms like 'incoherent', 'unforgivable', 'cynical' and 'intellectual incest' (1992: 81).

I am not arguing that these types of encounter are the norm in our journals; they constitute a sub-genre, but one which has grown to take up considerable space in each issue of a number of U.S.-published ESL and Composition journals[1]. As we have seen, this is a genre which features exchanges which tend to be adversarial and which often lapse into the *ad hominem*. We have seen how the 'temperature' can be raised in rhetorically identifiable ways: labeling to type, overgeneralising and damnation by association - all elements common to Straw Man argumentation. I suggest that analyses like these of the discourse of our own academic community can help us to reflect more on our own peer communicative practices. We can then ask how far educationists are well served by discourses which are intolerant of divergent voices, or by curricular approaches which sees education as peripheral to where the 'real' struggle for democracy should take place.

My aim in featuring this particular exchange was to offer for reflection what strikes me as the dissonance between theory and practice arising if teachers are to, for example, advocate whole curriculum approaches to EAP, whilst framing their own professional discourse in adversarial, exclusionary terms. The topic of the debate is clearly apt, for a similar debate could well have been held over the kinds of changes I am about to offer for consideration in the next section.

Promoting Autonomy in Curricular Practice: Some Proposals

I have argued for the relevance of critical language awareness, critical discourse analysis and, to some extent, personal construct theory to the way in which we look at the world, at our own discourse, and at how we shape our curricular priorities and approaches. Following Pennycook (1994c), I suggest the policy of pursuing an overly psycholinguistic approach to language learning and curriculum has hampered the development of curricula promoting a more critical form of language awareness - not only among our students, but also within our own profession - and hence in the rest of the academy. In this section, I shall look at a range of ways in which a more critical perspective of language socialisation can be promoted in curricular practice.

As I have suggested, we need to take a very broad perspective when attempting to promote learner autonomy in the tertiary curriculum. We should aspire to, and work to bring about, a curricular approach with the following features:

social construction of meaning - in practice: ensure that intellectual acceptance of the social construction of meaning is translated into academic practice; the implications for the curriculum may be, for example, that we focus less on striving to understand an external world [or indeed the internal world of the mind] - a set of truths about that world - and focus more on the social dynamics and purposes with which we interact to prosecute certain beliefs and resist others. We need to reflect on the relationship between our knowledge-making beliefs and our communicative practices;

language awareness and language socialisation: promote versions of language awareness which construct languages as expressions of culture and identity, drawing on the broadest linguistic resources of the community, and which encompass not only performance, cognitive and affective domains but also social and power domains. Hamilton (1993) points to the elasticity of the term 'language awareness': how it can range from signifying a view of language decontextualised in static purity from its actual use to one where language is embedded dynamically and inexorably in its social and political uses. Janks & Ivanic, for example, are careful to talk about promoting a *discourse which does not disempower others* & which *resists disempowerment* - an *emancipatory discourse* (1992). Teachers should be conscious of the disempowering force of paternalistic attitudes to, or constructions of, students.

language awareness throughout an integrated curriculum: see language awareness aims of EAP programmes can only realistically be realised in the context of the overall tertiary curriculum. This aim may best be pursued by EAP teachers exploiting opportunities to draw faculty colleagues into collaborative activities - whether in team teaching or in participating in a scheme for offering structured feedback on student writing, something we are experimenting with at HKU.

autonomy as education for social empowerment: address the full socio-political empowering conditions necessary for promoting student autonomy. We need to take on board how we construct knowledge, who 'owns' and has rights over that knowledge, who universities are *for*, & not simply work to maximise the decision-making prerogatives of the learner. Students are constructed as full participants in the academic community, with a licence to practice as knowledge makers. We need to incorporate a theoretical look at the sociology of knowledge (how we construct knowledge) and about how we seem to prosecute and defend our own professional positions almost as vehemently as people defending their physical property. In this connection, we need to accept the diverse ways in which students may engage with the curriculum, and with prevailing academic knowledge-sharing practices. Diverse 'genres' may emerge which are grounded in students' own ideas of making sense of - even challenging and questioning - the conventions of academic practice.

language as content: frame *discourse* about what we know - and 'how it is we come to think and talk as we do' - as part of the *content* of the EAP curriculum. Pursue a curriculum whose content as well as its approach works towards increasing student autonomy, defined in terms of:

- their critical and skeptical faculties,
- their level of language awareness

Students themselves need to become involved in discourse analysis, both generic and critical, and gain confidence and facility in talking *about* communication (and see Nunan, 1995, on students becoming *ethnographic researchers*). There is a great deal of more critical and politically-sensitive work on discourse analysis available now, which looks beyond conventional text to the media, in both text and image (Fairclough, 1995; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1990; Lee, 1992; Myers, 1994), and also to academic discourse itself (Dillon, 1991; Edmondson, 1984; Grimshaw, 1989; Myers, 1990; Selzer, 1993[2]). The conditions - and resources- are in place for the EAP curriculum to become more *metadiscursive* in orientation. I do not share Freedman's misgivings when she asks: *'can the complex web of social, cultural and rhetorical features to which genres respond be explicated at all, or in such a way that can be useful to learners ?'* (1993; 225)

an action- & discovery-based curriculum: risk 'error' and approximation through student-led investigation, rather than stick to a lockstep approach, trying to ensure adequate preparation before undertaking the 'authentic' academic task. This may be the least radical, or critical, recommendation but by emphasising the key role of primary research, it formally acknowledges students' right to full participation in the knowledge creation process. Such an approach, I argue, confirms that the investigative process, the review of other work and the reporting of one's research findings and conclusions, are all inextricably linked

in the same process of knowledge 'renewing', part of the investigative cycle comprising discourse/communication of various kinds. An investigative approach thus allows students to make the kinds of 'personalised' discoveries academics make during their research, rather than being over-coached with hindsight-driven advice and preparation. Nunan (e.g. 1991, 1995) has argued for language curriculum content to be related beyond the classroom to students' own language experiences and cultures. We need to leave curricular 'space' to students, accepting that student learning activities are best driven by their own enthusiasms, needs and initiative; the course philosophy need only frame the broad substantive issues and task requirements of the course. This 'balancing act' necessarily relies on:

- a lower-profile teacher role, more as an adviser and steerer of the project, pointing students to potential problems, issues, etc.
- a high degree of peer collaboration and interaction, a team effort, maintaining the momentum of the activities independently of the teacher, and (I suggest) reconciling the ideal of individualised learning with that of peer collaboration.
- an emphasis on academic processes rather than student products, placing the focus on the investigation - the practice - rather than the theory, on questioning rather than accepting what is presented as authoritative knowledge/theory.

Conclusion

The very ESL-medium nature of higher education for NNS of English gives English teachers the practical opportunity to combine two key roles, one conventional, the other less so. The conventional role is to provide students with the linguistic means to understand academic texts and express academic ideas; the less conventional role would be to use their sociolinguistic and pedagogical experience and sensitivity to change teaching and learning practice within their institution. It is the second of these roles which I feel is vital for creating the pre-conditions for learner autonomy within educational institutions, and which points to the need for a 'stronger' profile for the *language* teaching profession in tertiary institutions. Autonomy needs to be defined in terms of a set of conditions rather than an individual 'state of grace', accorded to students by enlightened, 'hands-off' curriculum designers. Our practice constitutes the example we set as 'preachers' of mutual respect, tolerance of diversity and an integrated, knowledge-making academic community. These 'conditions' are more likely to be achieved through the kinds of concerted 'strong' approaches to language in the curriculum taken by the *Whole Language* and *Critical Language Pedagogy* movements, which acknowledge

- the *whole curriculum* as the teaching and learning context within which language teaching professionals operate (in ESL-medium tertiary education this has clear implications for how one sees the relationship between language ('what we teach' ?) and content ('what they teach' ?), &

- *critical language awareness* and language teaching as being the next crucial frontier in any curriculum pretending to engage seriously with issues of student autonomy and empowerment (see Clark, 1992; Janks & Ivanic, 1992).

I have argued that what is at stake for an enhanced language awareness across the curriculum is not the circularity of arguing whose interpretation is the valid, correct or better one, but the very awareness that words are not simply what we want them to mean. I suggest teachers consider how far the following 'precepts' resonate with their experience:

- the power of words is decided socially, not in their denotations, or even in any universal connotations;
- the power of knowledge lies in whose interests it promotes and whose it subjugates
- substantive autonomy in the educational context lies not so much in being accorded freedom of action and choice within the curriculum as in a community-wide understanding of the full socio-political conditions and implications of the interpellations of 'teacher' and 'learner' - and 'academic' and 'researcher' - in the education and academic systems;

If we accept this kind of interrelationship of discourses in the academy, and if our teaching philosophy defines our practice in terms of social action, then there is a case for promoting language awareness among all the communities in the academy, right across the curriculum. As a more linguistically 'aware'

community, the language teaching profession should, I argue, play a seminal role in that enterprise. With such an interventionist philosophy, it may seem paradoxical, if not contradictory, to propose at the same time accepting the full diversity of philosophies in the debate, rejoicing in a matrix of diverse views. Demanding that an item be placed on the agenda does not necessarily entail that we want to rig the result of a vote on it - that presupposes a dualist perspective on action. The impetus should be towards greater individual and collective understanding, & in that regard, *our* struggle for understanding is our *students'* struggle. As teachers, with responsibility to our students intensified through our power/knowledge relation to them, we need to reflect on our *own* practice *critically*. This needs to involve sharing with them those discourses which academics use, both to construct each other and to construct the knowledge and perspectives that constitute the curriculum (see Hunston, 1993; Bowers & Iwi, 1993). I suggest that it is through this kind of critical introspection that we are likely to discover the discrepancies between our horizontal peer discourse - our research practice - and our vertical teacher-student discourse - our teaching practice and the curricular values we preach.

Notes

[1] Other examples of exchanges exhibiting a notably adversarial tenor are the already-cited *JSLW* exchange between Johns and Santos, and (also cited) between Trimbur and Hairston in *College Composition & Communication* (1993, 44,2), and two exchanges in *TESOL Quarterly*, issue 28, 4 (1994), between Braine and Canagarajah (609-617) and, in response to Benesch (1993), between Benesch and Allison (618-624).

[2] Selzer (1993) offers a fascinating multi-faceted analysis of a single academic paper, *The Spandrels of San Marco and the Panglossian Paradigm*, written (jointly with Richard Lewontin) by the outspoken and best-selling biologist Stephen Jay Gould. These authors engage at times in a caricature of the adaptationist position, e.g.: *If one adaptive argument fails, try another ... (or) assume another must exist* (152). See particularly the papers by Couture ('*Provocative architecture*': 276-309) and Myers ('*Making enemies*': 256-275). Gould, in his final response to the collection of papers, makes an intriguing defence of adversarial argumentation:

> *the defence of pluralism by adversarial devices is honorable (dishonor lies only in the frequent misuse of adversarial style), potentially effective and practically necessary. How else could we proceed, given the opposition ? And how else is cultural pluralism defended in America today ? (330)*

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